

BLACKFOOT COMMUNITY PROJECT

Our Land, Our Future

STATE NATURAL RESOURCES
COMMITTEE NO. 6
DATE 2-19-07
BILL NO. SB 452

February 19, 2007

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Natural Resources Committee:

My name is Hank Goetz and I am the Lands Director for the Blackfoot Challenge, a watershed group headquartered in Ovando.

The Challenge and The Nature Conservancy of Montana have formed a unique partnership to purchase up to 88,000 acres of Plum Creek Timber Company land in the Blackfoot valley and then re-sell it to a mix of private and public parties according to a community-based plan. To date, we have purchased approximately 68,000 acres and sold just over 26,000.

The purpose of our Blackfoot Community Project is to conserve the rural lifestyle and natural resources of the Blackfoot Valley. Specifically we want to try and help the private ranches remain viable, manage the forests in a sustainable way to provide raw material to our local mills, and preserve the access and recreational opportunities that these corporate timberlands have traditionally provided. We also want to protect the wide range of wildlife and bird/animal habitat that enables our area to have one of the most intact landscapes left in Montana.

Our Blackfoot Community Project goals mirror exactly those of SB 452. At present the tools needed to accomplish these cooperative conservation projects are limited at the state level and federal programs such as the Land and Water Conservation Fund are at historic lows. I urge your favorable consideration of SB 452 because it will provide an excellent tool to those folks around the state that are trying to preserve the working landscapes that help make Montana, Montana.

Thank you.



Hank Goetz

793-5589